



Prepared Testimony

by
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before the
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Hearing on “Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA)”
for the 2010 Census

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On behalf of the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT), Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Local Update Census Addresses (LUCA) Program on towns and townships.

My name is Keith Hite, and I am here today representing more than 12,000 towns and townships across America. I am the Board president for NATaT and the executive director of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS).

NATaT was formed more than 30 years ago to provide America's smaller communities – towns, townships and other suburban and rural localities – with a strong voice in Washington, DC. NATaT's purpose is to represent these smaller communities, champion fair-share federal funding decisions, and promote legislative and regulatory policies designed to strengthen grassroots local government. Since 1976, NATaT has strived to educate lawmakers and other federal officials about the unique nature of small town government operations and the need for policies that meet the special needs of suburban and non-metro communities.

Of the approximately 39,000 units of local government in the United States today, 85 percent serve communities with less than 10,000 people and nearly half have fewer than 1,000 residents. Nearly one quarter of all Americans live in rural areas; this is approximately the same percentage of Americans that live in central cities.

Despite the strong numbers of towns and townships, when it comes to important funding and legislative decisions that are made in Washington, many of our smaller communities can sometimes get lost in the shuffle. As you know, many state and federal programs allocate funds based at least partially on population counts; undercounting therefore can lead to a loss of deserved funding for antipoverty, law enforcement, education, infrastructure, and other programs. A February 2003 Government Accountability Office report indicated that in fiscal year 2000, about \$283 billion in federal grant money was distributed to state and local governments based in part on factors such as annual population estimates derived from the 1990 Decennial Census. When the population estimates were updated to reflect the 2000 Census results, an additional \$388 million in federal grant funding went predominately to the 23 states that had above-average estimate revisions.

Towns and townships cannot afford to be undercounted in the 2010 Decennial Census. NATaT has been working hard to encourage its members to accept invitations to fully participate in the LUCA program. NATaT supports the LUCA program and recognizes that LUCA provides smaller communities an opportunity to avoid an undercount and help keep population estimates accurate.

During the preparations for the 2000 Census, through the LUCA program, local officials were able to rectify problems that would have led to an even larger undercount. For example, in Michigan, the lines that were drawn to separate jurisdictions ran through office buildings and college dormitories, and new housing subdivisions were left off the Census address lists. LUCA gave towns and townships the opportunity to correct the Census address files and improve the accuracy of the 2000 Census count for smaller communities.

Overall, the Census is important for smaller communities for purposes of reapportionment and funding for critical programs. First, towns and townships deserve fair representation in Congress. Without an accurate count, smaller communities would be underrepresented.

Of equal importance are the many federal and state programs that distribute monies based on population counts. My own state of Pennsylvania and other states nationwide allocate multiple sources of funding based on population counts. Examples include:

Pennsylvania townships maintain more miles of roads and bridges than all six New England states combined. However, without an accurate population count, Pennsylvania townships would not receive the appropriate amount of money needed to maintain their extensive transportation system.

In Pennsylvania, a portion of the fines collected by the State Police are distributed to local governments to use for public safety programs. The Pennsylvania State Police utilizes Census Bureau data to determine the distribution to local governments.

Eligibility for Pennsylvania's state-administered Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is dependent on population data. Communities below 4,000 in population are not eligible for CDBG funding, and funding is limited for communities between 4,000 and 10,000.

In many states, Census population counts also determine the structure of towns and townships and the types of services they can provide. Examples include:

In Ohio, state law permits a township over a certain population to adopt an alternate form of township government. Townships that have more than 5,000 people in the unincorporated territory may elect to have home rule. If the township has more than 15,000 in the unincorporated territory, the board of trustees may unanimously adopt home rule without a vote of residents. The population figure is based on the last decennial census.

In order to become a city in Ohio, a village must have more than 5,000 people within the incorporated limits. Conversely, if a city drops below 5,000 people within the incorporated territory, then they must drop to village status.

The 932 towns in New York are divided into three classes (second, first and suburban) depending upon their population and/or assessed valuation. The classification of the town determines the government structure of the town as well as the authority of the town. For example, whether a town has three elected assessors or one appointed assessor is determined in part by the classification of a town.

In addition to government structure, whether a town can or must provide certain services to its residents is dictated in part by population in New York. For example, the authority to set speed limits on local roads is tied to a town's population. A majority of the towns

in New York do not have the authority to set speed limits on their own roads – instead they must petition the State Department of Transportation.

NATaT supports the LUCA program to ensure an accurate count on Census day. NATaT is the voice for over 12,000 towns and townships across America and we hope to continue ensuring that the needs and interests of small communities are reflected in all major federal statutory, regulatory, funding, and policy decisions made in Washington, including the 2010 Decennial Census. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective with you and I would be happy to answer any of your questions.